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PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ADAPTED TO PUBLIC NEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

I - PREPARING TRAINING PROGRAMMES

1. Evaluating the needs of the population

2. Integrating new graduates into a network for the distribution of services

II - BASIC PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

1. Official recognition of teaching establishments and training programmes

2. Professional examinations

3. Recognition of practical training centres

4. The quality of training

III - CONTINUOUS TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

1. Maintaining the level of professional competence

2. Evaluating professional competence

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

As a result of its mandate under the new professional legislation, the Office des professions is often called upon to give advice and suggestions concerning ways of ensuring that professionals receive the best possible training. It was therefore with the greatest pleasure and liveliest interest that I agreed to participate in this conference on the concept of a regional university of health sciences and introduce you to the Office's interpretation of the role played by professional training in the creation of a network of professional services fully adapted to public needs.

The Office is particularly interested in this subject because of the influence professional training has on the distribution of services and the satisfaction of public needs. Both the teaching institutions and the professional corporations are rather reticent when it comes to the application of professional training adapted to the needs of the users. These groups consider that, generally speaking, professional training should correspond to the highest North American standards, but this does not necessarily entail training programmes adapted to the specific needs of the population.

In fact, because of its role in recognizing the basic diplomas required to practice a profession and in obtaining Government approval of both the equivalence regulations for diplomas or training programmes proposed by the professional corporations and the regulations creating additional conditions such as practical training and professional examinations, the Office des professions is in a position to note that the differences of opinion between the teaching institutions and the professions which are often made so much of - theoretical versus practical training, for example - do not prevent these groups from almost always being in perfect agreement on the subject of stiffer training requirements.

Ever since its creation, the Office has tried to resist the constant pressure both the teaching institutions and the professional corporations have applied to have the Office use each new regulation to raise the requirements of professional training. The Office has, on the contrary, endeavoured to modify the professional training system so as to take into account insofar as possible, two elements the Office considers essential for the protection of the public: the technical quality of the professional act and the geographic and financial availability of services.

As far as the Office is concerned, protecting the public in its relations with professionals and, more particularly, with those in the health services, means essentially encouraging the creation of a network of services which truly corresponds to the needs and expectations of the population in that it makes high-quality professional services universally available.

If such a network is to offer the public high-quality services, professionals must be able to acquire, during the course of their training, scientific knowledge, technical skill, attitudes , habits and values which will enable them to meet the needs of the population adequately. Professionals must also be in a position to maintain and develop their basic skills throughout their career.

If the professional services offered by the network are to be available to the entire population, there must be a sufficient number of professionals to satisfy demand, ensure adequate geographical distribution and keep the price of such services at a reasonable level.

If it is to satisfy the needs of the population adequately, a complete network of professional services must be characterized by a certain balance between quality and availability. This is the reasoning underlying the work done by the Office in the field of professional training, whether it be the preparation of new programmes, the adjustment of academic and professional training requirements, the organization of continuous training courses, or the introduction of continuing evaluation of professional competence.

I - PREPARING TRAINING PROGRAMMES

In order to satisfy all the needs of the population, training programmes must turn out different types of professionals whose skills correspond to different needs. Before introducing new training programmes and extending them to new teaching institutions, or making major changes to existing institutions, the number and the type of professionals required to meet the needs of the population must be determined in as specific and objective a manner as possible and the process by which new graduates will be integrated into a network distributing professional services must also be determined.

1. Evaluating the needs of the population

Although, generally speaking, it is difficult to give an objective evaluation of the professional services required by the population, to divide the work and the responsibility among different categories of professionals or to determine the degree of qualification required for satisfactory work, the fact remains that it is usually those training centres most deeply rooted in the community which are in the best position to take the initiative in creating new programmes. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that, in order to best develop training programmes, all the groups concerned in the creation of a new programme must be consulted - those who will use the services, those who will dispense the knowledge, and those who will apply that knowledge.

Both the professional corporations and the Office des professions are given the opportunity of expressing their opinion on the advisability and sometimes the quality of a projected programme during the consultations which precede its introduction. It must be emphasized at this point that these two aspects of a new programme must always be judged on the basis of the good the public can derive from the utilization of the graduate's skills and not on the interest certain professional groups might have in the rejection or

acceptance of the programme.

It is,in fact, easy to conceive of a group of professionals who oppose the introduction of a new programme because the graduates would be competing with their members. On the other hand, certain professional groups might favour such a programme because their members could use the graduates for certain tasks without allowing them to exploit their abilities to the full.

Given these possibilities, it becomes apparent that the new programmes should be organized with a view to the actual opportunities the graduates will have to use their skills for the benefit of the public.

2. Integrating new graduates into a network for the distribution of services

The very definition of the fields of professional practice should make it possible to prepare training programmes which ensure a balance between the competence of the people

trained and the availability, geographic distribution and fees of professionals. The fields of practice should not, however, become closed areas of knowledge which would make it difficult to train people capable of working on a multidisciplinary team or capable of working in different areas of their profession.

Consequently, in order to promote the continuous adaptation of the fields of practice to the new demands of a satisfactory distribution of professional services, the Office hopes to encourage a more flexible definition of fields of practice whenever this is desirable and does not adversely affect public security.

To this end, legislation on the professions provides for the delegation of professional acts; certain corporations will therefore be obliged to recognize the ability of categories of people other than their members to perform certain acts which traditionally form part of the exclusive fields of practice of those corporations. The Office is doing its utmost to have the necessary measures in effect by summer in the fields of medicine, nursing care and auxiliary nursing aid. It hopes that professional training in these fields will give greater emphasis to interprofessional collaboration than to the identification of demarcation lines between different professional levels or disciplines.

These goals will be achieved only insofar as the universities and CEGEPs, in cooperation with the professional corporations, manage to adapt to the new requirements of rational distribution of services by avoiding too rigid a definition of the fields of knowledge, becoming a more integral part of their community, and creating training programmes which correspond to the various aspects of public needs.

II - BASIC PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

There is a basic assumption made by all the organizations concerned that it is all important to ensure the highest quality of professional training. The Office recognizes the value of this point of view, especially since the general public is very particular about the quality of professional training and the degree of professional competence, but, in order to guarantee quality, certain measures are applied which impose standards for programmes and training centres which do not always correspond to the needs of the community in which the professional will be working. Official recognition of teaching establishments and training programmes, professional examinations, recognition of practical training centres, the definition of the quality required within the context of such evaluation techniques and various other points should therefore be made the subject of mature reflection.

1. Official recognition of teaching establishments and training programmes

Professional corporations in Québec, in cooperation with the Canadian and American associations, often establish procedures for recognizing teaching establishments and training programmes so that their members may have a certain mobility. Even though such recognition has no legal status, it is generally well received by the faculties and departments of the teaching institutions which are themselves interested in such a set-up if only because it enables them to negotiate more favourable budgets with the college and university administrations.

These procedures are justifiable insofar as the comparison between various institutions is considered essential to the quality of training. One wonders, however, how much influence such evaluations have on the objectives of a training programme. When the basic framework within which training is given is determined by national and international standards, is the orientation of training, that is, the content and objectives of the course, not also determined to a large extent? If this is so, the situation could well arise where a training programme corresponding to the specific needs of a region could not be given in a teaching institution in that region unless it met the

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I am on this subject, I would like to mention
place in Québec on the Medical Council of
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It would appear that the training centre and, more specifically, the practical training centre plays an important role in determining where the student will choose to work. If this hypothesis is sound, there will have to be a greater variety of communities and regions where practical training may be obtained.

In this case, however, the people responsible for planning practical training may well be faced with a new dilemma: insufficient resources in isolated regions may make it difficult to meet the required standards of quality. Should we, in order to attract professionals to such regions, recognize certain local centres for practical training even though the resources are not up to standard? The problem is particularly critical for certain professions, in the health services, for instance, where it is generally agreed that considerable resources are required in order to give students an adequate practical training.

The problem of the recognition of practical training centres arises in the more general context of the pertinence of the criteria usually applied when measuring the quality of training.

4. The quality of training

It is sometimes taken for granted that the longer the training period, the more advanced the equipment, the more specialized the instruction and the stricter the selection criteria on admission or during examinations held during the training programme, the higher the quality of instruction must be. It also seems to be taken for granted that any high-quality training programme must necessarily include periods of practical training.

Even if these are not necessarily determining factors, they must be examined in the light of training objectives. There is a temptation to evaluate the quality of training solely on the basis of the material and human resources invested or on the basis of the quality and specialization of the knowledge transmitted in the programme.

This evaluation does not always take into consideration the wastage involved when the educational resources used to train specialists are profitable for the trainees but do not correspond to the real needs of the profession or the needs of the people who turn to professionals for services. This discrepancy may lead to high and unjustified training costs; since costs cannot be cut for fear or sacrificing quality, those responsible for training may be forced to reduce the number of students.

Reducing the number of students automatically
eans reducing the available professional labour force. This
ay be to the advantage of practicing professionals but it
ends to decrease the availability of services without, for
ll that, improving the quality. The effort to systematically
rain professionals to offer services which satisfy ever higher
tandards of quality is particularly debatable since the desire
o offer high-quality services in every case does not necessarily
orrespond to the needs of the population which may often be
atisfied with less complex services.

II - CONTINUOUS TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

If professionals are to meet the needs of the
opulation, it is not enough that they receive their basic
raining in the regions in which they will practice. Professional
ompetence must be maintained at a level which corresponds to
hose needs and must therefore be subject to continuous re-
valuation.

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in this area. On the contrary, given the pressing nature of the work to be done, all the organizations concerned with continuous professional training should collaborate.

Universities and CEGEPs should plan to cooperate with professionals and employers by making the existing educational infrastructures available to them and by helping to study the sectors where continuous training is considered a priority or where it is difficult to obtain because of the isolation of the professionals.

It is worth noting in this respect that the nature of professional practice in isolated regions often makes it difficult to maintain professional competence at the desired level. There are often too few professionals to ensure that the needs of the region are satisfied and it is therefore difficult for practitioners to leave their work, even for a day, to take part in continuous training sessions in urban centres. Training should therefore be made available to professionals in the regions where they practice. The teaching institutions dotted throughout the province would probably serve the purpose and help maintain the quality of professional services in their respective regions.

The Office, however, does not believe this type of training can be financed entirely and systematically by public funds. This matter must be studied within the larger context of Québec's educational needs as a whole. There is therefore no question of relieving professionals of responsibility for the direct costs of continuous training.

2. Evaluating professional competence

While leaving the professional with the responsibility for deciding how to maintain his level of competence, the new legislation makes the professional corporations officially responsible for verifying the competence of their members by means of professional inspection. This new measure should make it possible not only to guide those members whose level of competence is unsatisfactory towards refresher and upgrading courses, but also to identify weaknesses in the quality of professional practice.

The information gathered during professional inspections could thus serve not only to determine the content of continuous training programmes but also to improve the quality of basic training. This information could also be analyzed from the point of view of the geographic situation of the professionals. Such an analysis would make it possible to identify particular problems constantly encountered by

professionals in a given region and help the regional university organize its training programme in consequence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to recall that just like those persons interested in the concept of a regional university of health sciences, the Office is concerned with adapting professional training to the needs of the population. The theme of the regional university thus corresponds to the ideas the Office has developed on the need to ensure that training is well rooted in the communities it is to benefit.

The idea of a training programme in which the various levels and disciplines would be subordinated to a theme or sector of social reality, such as health services, is not without a very definite attraction. Such a formula would probably lead the way to multidisciplinary work.

It is thus to be hoped that the universities and CEGEPs introduce future professionals to team work and multidisciplinary cooperation. An early awareness of the

interdependence of professional disciplines will awaken students to the fact that once they begin working in the professional world, their personal competence will not enable them to provide adequate solutions to all the complex problems they will encounter.

In short, it is to be hoped that the ideas I have outlined here on the interdependence of professional training and professional practice will help modify the present tendency to impose stiffer requirements and standardize norms for evaluating the quality of training. The systematically and continuously stiffer requirements for the level, the length and the content of training programmes may lead away from the result sought if the needs of the population served by the professionals are not given sufficient consideration.